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**Opening Extract from...**

# Queen's Gambit

Written by Elizabeth Fremantle

Published by Michael Joseph

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# Queen's Gambit

Elizabeth Fremantle

MICHAEL JOSEPH
*an imprint of*
PENGUIN BOOKS

MICHAEL JOSEPH

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 707 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3008, Australia
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre,
Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, Auckland 0632, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, Block D, Rosebank Office Park, 181 Jan Smuts Avenue,
Parktown North, Gauteng 2193, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

First published 2013

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Set in 13.5/16pt Garamond MT
Typeset by Palimpsest Book Production Limited, Falkirk, Stirlingshire
Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

HARDBACK ISBN: 978–0–718–17706–5
TRADE PAPERBACK ISBN: 978–0–718–17707–2

www.greenpenguin.co.uk




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ALWAYS LEARNING PEARSON

# I

*Whitehall Palace, London,*
*March 1543*

There has been a late snowfall and the covered turrets of Whitehall Palace disappear against a tapioca sky. The courtyard is ankle deep in slush and, in spite of the sawdust that has been strewn in a makeshift path across the cobbles, Katherine can feel the wet chill soaking through her shoes, and the damp edges of her skirts flick bitterly at her ankles. She shivers, hugging her thick cloak tightly about her as the groom helps Meg dismount.

'Here we are,' she says brightly, though bright is the last thing she feels, holding out her hand for Meg to take.

Her stepdaughter's cheeks are flushed. The colour sets off her brown eyes, making them look fresh and limpid. She has the sweet, slightly startled look of a woodland animal but Katherine can see the effort it is taking her to hold off more tears. She has taken her father's death badly.

'Come,' says Katherine, 'let's get inside.'

Two grooms have unsaddled the horses and are brushing them down briskly with handfuls of straw, bantering between themselves. Katherine's grey gelding Pewter throws his head about with a jingle of tack and snorts, billowing trails of steam like a dragon.

'Easy, boy,' says Katherine, taking his bridle and stroking his velvet nose, allowing him to snuffle at her neck. 'He needs

a drink,' she says to the groom, handing him the reins. 'It's Rafe, isn't it?'

'Yes, m'lady,' he replies. 'I remember Pewter, I gave him a poultice once.' A hot blush rushes over his cheeks.

'Yes, he was lame. You did a fine job with him.'

The boy's face breaks into a grin. 'Thank you, m'lady.'

'It is I who should thank *you*,' she says, turning as Rafe leads Pewter towards the stable block. She clasps her step-daughter's hand and makes for the great doors.

She has been numb with grief for weeks and would rather not have to come to court so soon after her husband's death, but she has been summoned – Meg, too – and a summons from the King's daughter is not something it is possible to refuse. Besides, Katherine likes Lady Mary, they knew one another as girls, even shared a tutor for a while when Katherine's mother was serving Mary's mother – Queen Catherine of Aragon – before the King cast her off. Things were simpler in those days, prior to the great schism when the whole world was turned on its head, the country rent in two. But she won't be commanded to stay at court just yet. Mary will respect her period of mourning.

When she thinks of Latymer and what she did to aid his passing, turmoil rises within her like a pan of milk on the boil. She has to remember the horror of it all in order to reconcile herself to her actions: his anguished screams, the way his own body had turned on him, his desperate request. She has searched the Bible since for a precedent, but there is no story of merciful killing there, nothing to give hope for her blighted soul, and there's no getting away from it. She killed her husband.

Katherine and Meg enter the Great Hall, still hand in hand. It smells of wet wool and woodsmoke and is teeming with people, as busy as a market square. They mill in the alcoves

and strut in the galleries, showing off their fine clothes. Some sit in corners playing fox and goose or cards or dice, throwing down their bets. Occasionally a whoop goes up when someone has won or lost. Katherine watches Meg, wide-eyed at it all. She has never been to court, she's barely been anywhere, and after the deathly quiet of Charterhouse, all cloaked in black, this must be a rude awakening. They make a sombre pair in their mourning garb among the flocks of bright-clad ladies floating by, bubbling with chatter, their fine gowns swinging as they move as if they are dancing, always looking around to see who has noticed how finely dressed they are, or to remark, with green eyes, on who is better garbed than they. There is a fashion for little dogs that are bundled in their arms like muffs or trot at their heels. Even Meg manages a laugh to see one that has hitched a ride on its mistress's train.

Pages and ushers run back and forth and pairs of servant lads move through, burdened with baskets of logs, one between two, destined to stoke the fires in the public rooms. Long tables are being laid for dinner in the Great Hall by an army of kitchen boys, clattering and clanking by, each balancing an armful of dishes. A group of musicians tunes up, the dissonant chords eventually transforming into something like a melody. To hear music at last, thinks Katherine, imagining herself caught up in the sound, whirling and spinning until she can hardly breathe with joy. She stops that thought. She will not be dancing just yet.

They stop as a band of guards marches by and she wonders if they might be on their way to arrest someone, reminding her of how little she wants to be in this place. But a summons is a summons. She gasps as a pair of hands comes from nowhere, clapping themselves over her eyes and causing her heart to jump into her throat.

'Will Parr,' she exclaims laughing.

'How could you tell?' asks Will, dropping his hands.

'I would know your smell anywhere, brother,' she quips, pinching her nose in mock disgust and turning to face him where he stands with a group of men, beaming like a small boy, his brassy hair sticking up where he has removed his cap, his odd-coloured eyes – one water pale, one caramel – flashing in their impish way.

'Lady Latymer. I can hardly remember the last time I clapped eyes on you.' A man steps forward. Everything about him is long: long nose, long face, long legs, and eyes that have something of the bloodhound about them. But somehow nature has conspired to make him quite becoming in spite of his oddness. Perhaps it has something to do with the unassailable confidence that comes with being the eldest of the Howard boys, and next Duke of Norfolk.

'Surrey!' A smile invades her face. Perhaps it will not be so bad at court with these familiar faces about. 'You still scribbling verse?'

'Indeed I am. You will be pleased to know I have improved greatly.'

He once penned her a sonnet, when they were little more than children, and they had often laughed about it since – 'virtue' rhymed with 'hurt too'. The memory causes a laugh to bubble up in her. One of his 'juvenile embarrassments', as he had described it.

'I am sorry to see you in mourning,' he continues, serious now. 'But I heard how your husband suffered. Perhaps it is a mercy that he has finally passed.'

She nods, her smile dropping away, unable to find words to reply, wondering if he suspects her, scrutinizing his face for signs of condemnation. Have the circumstances of Latymer's

death been found out? Is it spreading through the corridors of the palace? Perhaps the embalmers saw something – her sin written into her dead husband's guts. She dismisses the thought. What she gave him leaves no trace and there is no accusation in Surrey's tone, she is sure of it. If it shows on her face, they will think her distraught with grief, but nevertheless her heart is hammering.

'Let me present my stepdaughter, Margaret Neville,' she says, pulling herself together.

Meg is hanging back and there is a barely disguised look of horror on her face at the idea of having to be introduced to these men, even if one is Will who is practically her uncle. Meg's discomfort is scored through her. Since those cursed events at Snape Katherine has kept her away from the company of men as much as she can, but now there is no choice. Besides, she will have to marry eventually. Katherine will be expected to arrange it, but God knows, the girl is not yet ready.

'Margaret,' says Surrey, taking Meg's hand. 'I knew your father. He was a remarkable man.'

'He was,' she whispers with a wan smile.

'Are you not going to present *me* to your sister?' A man has stepped up, tall, almost as tall as Surrey. He waves a velvet cap adorned with an ostrich feather the size of a hearth brush that bobs and dances as he gives the thing an unnecessary flourish.

Katherine stifles a laugh that rises from nowhere. He is got up spectacularly, in a doublet of black velvet with crimson satin spilling out of its slashes and finished with a sable collar. He sees her notice the sable, and he brings a hand up to stroke it, as if to emphasize his rank. She racks her brains to remember the sumptuary laws and who is entitled

to wear sable, trying to place him. His hands are weighed down with rings, too many for good taste, but his fingers are fine and tapered and they wander from the sable to his mouth. He draws his middle finger over his bottom lip slowly and deliberately, not smiling. But his eyes, periwinkle blue – obscenely blue – and his disarmingly direct gaze are making her feel flushed. She meets his look only momentarily, catching the briefest flutter, before dropping her eyes to the floor.

Did he wink at her? The insolence. He winked at her. No, it must have been her imagination. But then why is she imagining this overdressed ninny winking at her?

'Thomas Seymour, this is my sister Lady Latymer,' announces Will, who seems amused by whatever it is that has just happened.

She should have known. Thomas Seymour is bearer of the dubious accolade of 'comeliest man at court', the object of incessant gossip, youthful crushes, broken hearts, marital discord. She concedes inwardly to his looks; he is a beauty, that is indisputable, but she will not be drawn under his spell, she has lived too much for that.

'It is an honour, my lady,' he says in a voice as smooth as churned butter, 'to finally meet you at last.'

Surrey rolls his eyes.

So there's no love lost there, she thinks. 'Finally *and* at last!' It trips off her tongue before she can stop it; she can't help herself wanting to put this man in his place. 'Goodness!' She places a hand to her breast affecting exaggerated surprise.

'Indeed my lady, I have heard of your charms,' he continues unprovoked, 'and to be confronted with them makes me tongue-tied.'

By charms she wonders if he means her recently acquired wealth. News of her inheritance must have got out. Will for

one can't keep his mouth shut. She feels a little surge of anger for her brother and his blabbering.

'Tongue-tied?' This is a smooth one, she's thinking, searching for a witty retort. She keeps her look firmly directed at his mouth, not daring to meet his eyes again, but his wet pink tongue catches the light disturbingly. 'Surrey, what think you? Seymour has got his tongue in a knot.' Surrey and Will begin to laugh as she racks her brain for something more, finding it, chirping, 'And it might be his undoing.'

The three men burst into laughter simultaneously. Katherine feels triumphant; her wit has not deserted her, even in the face of this unsettling creature.

Meg stares at her stepmother aghast. She has not had much opportunity to see this Katherine, the sharp-witted courtly one. Katherine throws her a reassuring smile while Will introduces her to Seymour, who looks at her as if she is edible.

Katherine takes her hand, saying, 'Come, Meg, we will be late for Lady Mary.'

'So brief but yet so sweet,' simpers Seymour.

Katherine ignores him, placing a kiss on Surrey's cheek and, as she begins to walk away, half turning back and dipping her head in the general direction of Seymour for the sake of politeness.

'I shall walk with you,' says Will, sliding between the two of them, slipping his arms through theirs.

'I would prefer it, Will,' Katherine hisses, when they are up the stairs and out of earshot, 'if you would not discuss my inheritance with your friends.'

'You're too quick to accuse, sister; I've said nothing. It has got out, that was inevitable, but –'

She snaps over him, 'So what was all that about my so-called charms then?'

'Kit,' he laughs, 'I do believe he really was referring to your charms.'

She huffs.

'Do you always have to be the disgruntled elder sister?'

'I'm sorry, Will. You're right, it's not your fault that people talk.'

'No, it is *I* who should apologize. Things have been hard for you.' He pinches the black silk of her skirts between his fingers. 'You are mourning. I should be more sensitive.'

They walk in silence down the long gallery towards Lady Mary's rooms. Will seems to brood and Katherine suspects he might be wishing it were he in mourning for his wife. Those two loathed each other from the minute they met. Anne Bourchier, the sole heir of the elderly Earl of Essex, was the prize their mother had almost beggared herself to catch for her only son. With Anne Bourchier came great expectations, not least the Essex title to hitch the Parrs back up a notch or two. But the marriage had brought poor Will nothing, no children, no title, no happiness; nothing but disgrace, for the King had given Cromwell the earldom and Anne had eloped with some country cleric. Will couldn't shake off the scandal, was ever beset by jests of 'clerical errors' and 'priest's holes' and 'parson's noses'. He didn't see the funny side and, try as he might, he couldn't get the King to sanction a divorce.

'Thinking of your wife?' she asks.

'How could you tell?'

'I know you, Will Parr, better than you imagine.'

'She has spawned another brat with that cursed cleric.'

'Oh Will, the King will come round eventually and you will be able to make an honest woman of Lizzie Brooke.'

'Lizzie's running out of patience,' Will whines. 'When I

think of the hopes Mother had for my marriage, all she did to arrange it.'

'Well, she never lived to see its failure. Perhaps that is as well.'

'It was her greatest wish to see the Parrs on the rise again.'

'Our blood is good enough, Will. Father served the old King and his father served Edward IV, mother served Queen Catherine.' She counts them off on her fingers. 'Do you want more?'

'That's ancient history,' Will growls. 'I don't even remember Father.'

'I have only the vaguest memories of him,' she says, though she remembers clearly the day he was laid to rest; how indignant she'd felt at being deemed too young, at six years old, to attend the funeral. 'Besides, Sister Anne has served all five Queens and now serves the King's daughter. And it is likely I shall, too, once more.' She's irritated by her brother's ambition, wants to tell him that if he cares so greatly to raise the Parrs, then he should start currying favour with the right people instead of that Seymour fellow. Seymour may be Prince Edward's uncle but it is his elder brother Hertford who has the King's ear.

Will begins his grumbling again but seems to think better of it and they fall into step once more, weaving through the crowd that's milling about outside the King's chambers.

Then he squeezes her arm, saying, 'What think you of Seymour?'

'Seymour?'

'Yes, Seymour . . .'

'Not much.' Her voice is clipped.

'Do you not find him splendid?'

'Not particularly.'

'I thought we might try to make a match for him with Meg.'

'With Meg?' she blurts. 'Have you lost your mind?'

The colour has dropped from Meg's face.

He would eat the poor girl alive, she thinks. 'Meg will not be marrying anyone just yet. Not while her father is barely cold.'

'It was only –'

'A ridiculous idea,' she snaps.

'He is not what you think, Kit. He is one of us.'

By that she supposes he means he's for the new religion. She doesn't like to be packaged up with the court reformers, prefers to keep her thoughts on the matter close to her chest. She has learned over the years that it's safer to cultivate an opaqueness at court.

'Surrey doesn't like him,' she says.

'Oh, that's nothing but a family thing, not even about religion. The Howards think the Seymours upstarts. It has no bearing on Thomas.'

Katherine huffs.

Will leaves them to admire the new painting of the King that hangs in the gallery. It is so fresh she can smell the paint and its colours are vivid, with all the detail picked out in gold.

'Is that the last Queen?' asks Meg, pointing to the sombre woman in a gable hood beside the King.

'No, Meg,' she whispers, pressing a finger to her lips, 'best not mention the last Queen here. That is Queen Jane, the sister of Thomas Seymour whom you just met.'

'But why Queen Jane, when there have been two Queens since?'

'Queen Jane is the one who gave him the heir.' She omits

adding that Jane Seymour was the one who died before the King could tire of her.

'So that is Prince Edward.' Meg points to the boy, a pocket version of his father, mirroring his stance.

'It is, and they,' she indicates the two girls hovering about at the edges of the picture like a pair of butterflies with nowhere to alight, 'are Ladies Mary and Elizabeth.'

'I see you are admiring my portrait,' comes a voice from behind.

The women turn.

'Will Sommers!' Katherine sings. '*Your* portrait?'

'Do you not see me?'

She looks again, finding him in the back of the image.

'There you are. I hadn't noticed.' She turns to her step-daughter. 'Meg, this is Will Sommers, the King's fool, the most honest man at court.'

He stretches out a hand and pulls a copper coin from behind Meg's ear, provoking a rare delighted laugh from her.

'How did you do that?' she squeaks.

'Magic,' he replies.

'I don't believe in magic,' says Katherine. 'But I know a good trick when I see it.'

They are still laughing when they arrive at Lady Mary's apartments, where Mary's favourite, Susan Clarencieux, in egg-yolk yellow, looms over the inner door shushing them like an adder.

'She has one of her headaches,' Susan hisses with a tight smile. 'So keep the noise down.' Looking her up and down, as if totting up the cost of her dress and finding it wanting, she adds, 'So very dull and dark; Lady Mary will not approve.' Then her hand swoops to cover her mouth. 'Forgive me, I forgot you were in mourning.'

'It is forgotten,' replies Katherine.

'Your sister is in the privy chamber. Excuse me, I must deal with . . .' She doesn't finish and slips back into the bedchamber, closing the door silently behind her.

They move through into the room where a few ladies are scattered about with their needlework. Katherine nods at them in greeting before spotting Sister Anne in a window alcove.

'Kit,' says Sister Anne. 'What a pleasure to see you at last.' She stands and draws her sister into an embrace. 'And Meg.' She kisses Meg on both cheeks.

The girl has relaxed visibly now they are in the women's rooms.

'Meg, why don't you go and look at the tapestries? I believe your father is depicted in one. See if you can find him.'

Meg wanders to the other end of the room and the two sisters seat themselves on a bench in the window.

'So what's the occasion? Why do you think I have been summoned?' Katherine can hardly tear her gaze away from her sister, her easy smile, the translucent glow of her skin, the pale tendrils of hair escaping from her coif, the perfect oval of her face.

'Lady Mary is to stand godmother. Quite a few have been asked to attend.'

'Not just me then . . . I am glad of that. So who is to be baptized?'

'It is a Wriothesley baby. A daughter called . . .'

'Mary,' they say simultaneously, laughing.

'Oh Anne, how good it is to see you. My house is a gloomy one indeed.'

'I shall visit you at Charterhouse when Prin–' She cups both her hands over her mouth with a gasp. 'When Lady Mary gives me leave.' She leans right into Katherine's ear and

whispers, 'Lady Hussey was sent to the Tower for addressing her as Princess.'

'I remember that,' says Katherine. 'But that was years ago and she was making a stand. It was different. A slip of the tongue wouldn't be punished.'

'Oh Kit, you have been long away from this place. Have you forgotten what it is like?'

'Nest of snakes,' she murmurs.

'I hear the King sent Huicke to attend your husband,' says Anne.

'He did. I don't know why.'

'Latymer was certainly pardoned then.'

'I suppose so.'

Katherine had never fully understood Latymer's part in the uprising. The Pilgrimage of Grace, they'd called it, when the whole of the North, forty thousand Catholic men it was said, rose up against Cromwell's reformation. Some of the leaders had come to Snape armed to the hilt. There had been heated discussions in the hall and a good deal of shouting but she couldn't get the gist of what was being said. The next thing she knew Latymer was preparing to leave, reluctantly, he told her: they needed men like him to lead them. She wondered what kind of threats they'd made, for Latymer was not the sort to be easily coerced even though he thought their cause justified, with the monasteries razed, the monks strung from the trees and a way of life destroyed with them – not forgetting the beloved Queen cast aside and the Boleyn girl turning their great King about her finger like a toy. That was how Latymer described it. But to take arms up against his King; that was not the husband she knew.

'You have never talked of it,' says Anne. 'The uprising, I mean. What happened at Snape.'

'It is something I'd rather forget,' Katherine says, closing the conversation.

A version of events had spread around the court at the time. It was common knowledge that when the King's army had the rebels on the back foot, Latymer had left for Westminster to seek the King's pardon and the rebels thought he'd turned coat, sending Murgatroyd and his men to hold Katherine and Meg hostage, ransacking Snape – it made a good story for the gossips. But even her sister knew nothing of the dead baby, Murgatroyd's bastard son. Nor that she'd given herself to the brute in desperation, to save Meg and Dot from his clutches, the darkest secret of them all. She did save the girls but wonders what God thinks of that, for adultery is adultery according to the Church. Katherine has often wondered why it was that all the other leaders had swung, and Murgatroyd too – two and a half hundred put to death in the name of the King when the uprising failed – but not Latymer. Perhaps he *had* betrayed them. Murgatroyd had certainly assumed so. She prefers to believe that Latymer was loyal, as he'd maintained, otherwise what was it all for? But she will never know the truth.

'Did you ever hear anything, Anne, about Latymer and why he was pardoned? Were there any rumours at court?'

'Nothing reached my ears, sister,' says Anne, touching Katherine's sleeve, letting her hand rest there a moment. 'Don't dwell on it. The past is past.'

'Yes.' But she can't help thinking of the way the past erodes the present like a canker in an apple.

She looks across the chamber at Meg, who's intently searching the tapestry for her father's likeness. At least his image has not been stitched over like some. She looks back to Anne – sweet, loyal, uncomplicated Anne. There is something about

her, a freshness, as if she has more life in her than she can possibly contain. It strikes Katherine suddenly why this is. Her heart gutters and, leaning forward, she puts a hand to Anne's stomacher, asking, 'Is there something you are keeping from me?' She wonders if her smile hides the surge of jealousy that comes in the face of her sister's fertility. It is written all over her, the flush and bloom of pregnancy that Katherine has wanted so very much for herself.

Anne reddens. 'How is it you know everything, Kit?'

'That is wonderful news.' The words stick in her throat; her widowhood is a hard unassailable fact, with the possibility of a child nothing but a distant fantasy now at her age, with not a single living infant to her name, only the dead baby that is never spoken of.

Her thoughts must have seeped through the surface of her, for Anne places a comforting hand over hers with the words, 'There is still a chance for you, sister. You will surely marry again.'

'I think two husbands are enough,' Katherine replies, firmly closing the subject, though continuing in a whisper, 'but I am happy for you. I know *this* one won't be a little Catholic with Lady Mary as its godmother.'

Sister Anne brings a finger to her lips with a 'shhh' and the sisters share a secret smile. She stretches out a hand to the cross that hangs from Katherine's neck. 'Mother's diamond cross,' she says, holding it up so it catches the light. 'I remember it bigger than this.'

'It is you who was smaller.'

'It is a long time since Mother passed on.'

'Yes,' Katherine says, but all she can think of is the length of her mother's widowhood.

'And these pearls,' Anne is still fingering the cross, 'they

are almost pink. I'd forgotten. Oh dear, one of the links is loose.' She leans in closer. 'Let me see if I can mend it.' The tip of her tongue sticks out in concentration as she presses the open ends of the link between her thumb and forefinger.

Katherine enjoys her closeness. She can smell her scent; it is sweet and comforting, like ripe apples. She turns a little towards the panelling so Anne may better get to her throat. On the wood she can clearly see where the initials CH have been scraped away. Poor little Catherine Howard, the most recent Queen, these must have been her rooms. Of course they were, they are the best in the palace, save for those of the King.

'There,' says Anne, letting the cross drop back to Katherine's dress. 'You don't want to lose one of Mother's pearls.'

'How was it, Anne, with the last Queen? You have been quite silent about it.' Katherine's voice has dropped to a whisper and her fingers absently stroke the scraped place on the panelling.

'Catherine Howard?' she mouths.

Katherine nods in reply.

'Kit, she was so young, younger than Meg even.'

They both look over to Meg, seeming barely out of girlhood herself.

'She hadn't been raised to hold high position. Norfolk dredged her out of the further reaches of the Howard tribe to serve his own needs. Her manners, Kit, you can't imagine how crude she was or how shallow. But she was a pretty little thing and the King was utterly unmanned in the face of her . . .' She pauses, searching for the right word, '. . . her attractions. It was her appetite that was her undoing.'

'For men?' asks Katherine, further dropping her whisper.

The sisters' heads are close together now and their faces

are half turned towards the window so as not to be overheard.

'A compulsion almost.'

'Did you like her, Anne?'

'No . . . I suppose not. She was insufferably vain. But I wouldn't have wished *that* fate on anyone. To go to the block like that and so young. Kit, it was dreadful. Her ladies were questioned one by one. I had no idea what was happening. Some must have known what she'd been up to, carrying on like that with Culpepper, under the King's nose.'

'She was just a girl. She should never have been put in the bed of such an old man, King or not.'

They sit in silence for a while. Through the diamond panes Katherine watches a skein of geese fly over the lake in the distance. 'Who questioned you?' she asks eventually.

'It was Bishop Gardiner.'

'Were you frightened?'

'Petrified, Kit. He's a nasty piece of work. Not a man to cross. I once saw him dislocate a choirboy's finger for missing a note. I knew nothing, so there was little he could do with me. But we all had the Boleyn business in our minds.'

'Of course, Anne Boleyn. It turned out the same.'

'Just the same. The King withdrew, refused to see Catherine, as he had with Anne. The poor girl was mad with fear. Ran howling down the long gallery in just her kirtle. Her screams stay with me still. The gallery was teeming with people but no one so much as looked at her, not even her uncle Norfolk. Can you imagine?' She worries at her gown, pulling a loose thread. 'Thank heavens I wasn't chosen to serve her in the Tower. I couldn't have borne it, Kit. Standing by to watch her step up to the scaffold. Untie her hood for her. Bare her neck.' She shudders visibly.

'Poor child,' murmurs Katherine.

'And rumour has it the King seeks a sixth wife.'

'Who do they talk of?'

'The rumours fly as usual. Every unmarried woman has had her name bandied, even you, Kit.'

'Absurd,' mutters Katherine.

'It is Anne Bassett who people are putting their money on,' continues Anne. 'But she is nothing but a girl, younger even than the last one. I can't imagine him taking another young maid like that. Catherine Howard shook him to the core. But little Anne's family are pushing her forward nevertheless. She has a whole new wardrobe to flaunt.'

'This place,' says Katherine with a sigh. 'Did you know Will suggested a match between Meg and that Seymour fellow?'

'That doesn't surprise me in the least.' Anne rolls her eyes. 'They are thick as thieves, those two.'

'It won't happen,' Katherine snaps.

'So you weren't taken with the palace charmer then?'

'Not one bit. Found him . . .' She can't find the words, is too distracted by the fact that Seymour has been tapping at the edge of her mind this last hour. 'Oh, you know.'

'This lot wouldn't agree with you,' Anne says, nodding towards the group of younger maids strewn about the hearth chatting and pretending to sew. 'You should see how they flutter as he passes, like butterflies in a net.'

Katherine shrugs, telling herself that she is not one of those butterflies. 'Has he never been married; he must be, what, twenty-nine?'

'Thirty-four!'

'He carries his age well,' she says, surprised. But the thought that is foremost in her mind is that Thomas Seymour is older than she is.